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ABSTRACT

The author of this study collected data from occupational students in a large urban community college. All students were participating in a vocational skills laboratory (SAIL) supported by state funding. The Study Behavior Inventory (SBI) was administered to 100 students and demographic data was collected. Individual reports for each student profiled include measures of behaviors and attitudes in: (1) academic confidence; (2) short-term study behaviors; and (3) long-term study behaviors. The study was designed to identify the study behaviors of high-risk students in occupational programs at Miami-Dade Community College, Florida. About 38% of the 114,500 students enrolled there in 2000-2001 were occupational students. The 100 students were 42% male and 62% female, and ranged in age from 17 to 65. The mean age was 35. The average number of hours students worked per week was 38. Students were seeking entry into a wide variety of occupational fields. The students performed on the average of a 5th or 6th grade level in all of the basic skills, with the range going as low as the 1st grade level. Results of the study should help educators focus on specific skill strategies and behavior plans that can be individualized for each student, thus allowing the student to better navigate the educational system. (Contains 13 references.) (NB)

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Study Behaviors of High-Risk Occupational Students in the Community College

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Study behaviors of high-risk occupational students in the Community College

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Presented at the 2002 annual meeting of the Council for the Study of Community Colleges
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Study behaviors of college students have long been a concern of educators. As early as the 1940's study measures have been used to improve the study habits and thus the academic success of students in higher education. Today, as a result of open access, open admissions, social pressures, and less academically prepared students, colleges continue to deal with students who possess inadequate academic preparation in ever growing, expensive programs the best way they know how. Community college students seeking job preparation education are not different, in fact may be more at risk than transfer students.

The terms "study behaviors" and "study skills" have been used synonymously in the literature and in scholarly discussions to describe student characteristics which may be less than satisfactory in students who possess less than adequate preparation to succeed academically in undergraduate programs. (Bliss & Mueller, 1987, 1993). Study behaviors in this study refer to what students actually do and study skills refer to what things students are able to do. Study behaviors can be self-reported or observed actions. Students are often placed in prescriptive programs based on the assumption if they don't exhibit appropriate behaviors they don't have the skill and therefore are taught skills to overcome these behaviors when it is behaviors that need to be modified.

Study skills are easily identified. It is easy to say "students need to learn to study better." Those study skills that worked well for them in their high school careers should work well for them in college. Often, they have not developed good study skills and therefore the transfer cannot happen. The problem is to identify their study behaviors early and assist them in learning skills and behaviors that will continue to work for them while they study in the college. Two study behavior inventories, the Study Behavior Inventory (SBI) and the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) are commonly used for this purpose.

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Purpose of the study

It is well known that occupational students often come from a poole of low income, first generation students who come to college less academically prepared. This study looks at the study behaviors of occupational students in a large, urban community college where there is a majority of Black and Hispanic,

low income and first generation students. It attempts to answer the question: What are the study behaviors of high-risk occupational students?

Review of Literature

In higher education programs, an obstacle to understanding high-risk students is to identify how they study so they can capitalize on their study strengths and remediate their weakness. Student success can be attributed to improvement of study behaviors and improvement of remedial reading (McCallum Peters, 1999) and test-taking skills. If students know they have a good chance to be successful (in college) they may be more motivated to continue to overcome obstacles. If they know how they compare to others who succeed, they too have a chance of success.

Colleges and universities today are more diverse than historical elite universities. A larger population of potential college students is graduating from secondary schools and consequently more are attending colleges and universities. Urban community colleges enroll a number of student native to the community as well as students from foreign countries who come to the U.S. to study. Community colleges serve the community by preparing workers for employment in a variety of settings. Most of these programs prepare the workforce population at less than a bachelor's degree.

Understanding the learning processes of students aides in the implementation of activities designed to retain students in higher education programs. Students are told they must study to obtain good grades in school. Throughout their schooling, they are taught many skills to assist them in studying, some even develop successful study habits. Understanding differences in cultures is important to the teaching learning process. Moreno and DiVesta (1991) in studying 348 English-speaking, 142 bilingual Puerto Rican, and 109 monolingual Spanish college students, reported a stable and reliable factor structure across cultures for the Cognitive Skills Inventory (CSI) and its Spanish translation. Earlier studies such as Biggs (1978) who compared Canadian and Australian university students and Watkins and Hattie (1981) who compared Australian and Filipino students began the investigations into cultural differences and information processing but the cause of the differences in the literature were not fully discussed. Were the differences due to language or were they due to culture? Occupational students in community colleges represent a cultural group not completely understood due to lack of study.

Study behavior inventories

Bliss and Mueller (1987) described the state of research into instruments that measure study skills and study behaviors, pointing out that as early as 1941 Wren published the *Study Habits Inventory*, which examined reading and note taking strategies they used when preparing for examinations. At the end of World War II, however, emphasis in study skills instruction and measurement shifted to the formal study of reading speed and comprehension with reading experts leading the way in this field of study. Variables other than reading skills

were ignored as they were simply considered to be problems of motivation. This attitude had changed when Brown and Hotzman published the *Scale of Study Habits* in 1966. This instrument looked beyond simple reading and note taking skills in establishing a measure of what student do when they study. In 1983, Mueller and Gibson combined elements of the *Study Habits Inventory* and the *Scale of Study Habits and Attitudes* along with other variables suggested by the growing body of literature on study skills and behaviors to produce the *Study Behavior Inventory* (SBI) which has been repeatedly tested. Their first field studies with the instrument lead to the development of Form C of the instrument which added items dealing with test anxiety and coping behaviors. Form C was tested using 3,000 college and university students in the Chicago area, 17.7 percent of the degree-seeking students at the main campus (Gibson, 1983). The scores obtained were found to correlate highly with participants' high school and college grade point averages. In addition, subjects who reported the need for assistance in one or more of ten academic skills had lower scores on the SBI-C than those who did not report such a need.

Study Behavior Inventory (SBI). From the results of this study Mueller (1984) developed Form D of the *Study Behavior Inventory*. This form was a significant revision of the instrument in that it expanded the general study attitudes section while decreasing the number of items dealing with reading skills. The high intercorrelation of items allowed Mueller to decrease the number of items measuring specific skills while remaining confident that these skills were being adequately measured. Finally, the three-point rating scales of Form C were changed to four-point scales on Form D since there appeared to be a tendency for subjects to choose the middle response on the three-point scales. A series of large sample studies using this instrument (Bliss & Mueller, 1986, 1987, 1993) yielded responses with high levels of test-retest reliability. Factor analysis consistently extracted three factors. Factor 1 dealt with feelings of insecurity, low feels of efficacy as a student, and low levels of competitiveness in students when they were confronted with academic tasks. Factors 2 and 3 included behaviors related to the appropriate use of time, making reference to behaviors related to routine, repeated academic tasks such as doing assignments and preparing for classes and those involving more long range planning such as studying for examinations or the preparation of papers and other long term projects. Correlations of the whole instrument and the various factors with ACT and SAT scores ranged from the high .50's to the middle .60's. Correlations with grade point averages ranged from the middle .60s to the middle .70's.

This study concerns student learning and learning assessment. With a growing population of college-age students, non-traditional students and students who may require developmental serves, the community college is becoming an increasing provider of post-secondary education, particularly occupational preparation. Many of these students lack basic skills in reading, math, writing, English language, and critical thinking (Perin, 2001). Assisting this population of

students in the community college will take on greater and greater efforts as public policies are directed toward better work-force preparation.

Methods

Data were collected from occupational students in a large, urban community college. All students tested were participating in a vocational skills laboratory (SAIL) supported by state funding. The Study Behavior Inventory (SBI) was administered to 100 students and demographic data was collected. An individualized report was generated for each student, profiling measures of behaviors and attitudes in 1) academic confidence, 2) short-term study behaviors, and 3) long-term study behaviors. Specific areas addressed include time-management, study-reading, general study habits, listening-notetaking, writing, test anxiety, test-taking and faculty relations.

Research Design

This study was designed to identify the study behaviors of high-risk occupational students at an urban community college in south Florida. Because of its strong post-secondary adult vocational programs and academic success programs, it is a popular place for citizens in the community to begin higher education study. Students can take advantage of the many services offered to occupational students and gain the necessary basic literacy skills to integrate into certificate, applied and associate degree programs.

**Research Setting and Participants*

Miami-Dade Community College enrolls a high percentage of occupational students in its post-secondary adult and vocational certificate programs (PSAV), its applied technology degree programs and its associate in science programs. Of the more than 114,500 students who attended the college during the 2000-2001 academic year 38% were occupational. Sixty-nine percent of students attending the college during that semester were part-time students; Forty-one percent are considered resident alien, refugee or attend on student visa; the mean age was 29.82. The campus where the study participants attended represented 22% of the population; forty one percent are considered resident alien, refugee or attend on student visa; the mean age was 30.03. In terms of socioeconomic status, students attending MDCC are like students attending other urban public institutions of higher education.

A factor structure obtained from the scores on the SBI of these MDCC high-risk occupational students that is more like that obtained from other higher education institutions will be interpreted as evidence that these students are like other college students. On the other hand, should the factor structure not be similar to that obtained from other public university students, this will be interpreted as evidence that the differences were due to differences in the culture of the students or other factors.

Procedure

A convenience sample of 104 high risk students based on referrals from faculty participated in the study. These students were participating in a tutorial laboratory experience (SAIL) to gain basic skills of literacy. These students for the most part had not begin their credit courses and therefore did not present a GPA . The Study Behavior Inventory (SBI) was administered to each of these students and the students' TABE test scores were college records. Demographic data was also collected.

Materials

The Study Behavior Inventory (SBI) is an instrument that measures the study behaviors of college and university students in colleges and universities. It is presently in use at over 300 institutions of higher education in the United States. The SBI is highly correlated to predicting the GPA of college students (Bliss*. The SBI is a product of Androgogy Associates.

The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is a product of CTB/McGraw-Hill. It is designed to assess reading, mathematics, language, and spelling skills. It is also available in Spanish and basic skills in work-related contexts. It is available in paper-and-pencil and computer-based formats. The TABE 7/8, published in 1994 and used in this study, measures five content areas; reading, mathematics computation, applied mathematics, language and spelling (optional). TABE has been statistically correlated to the GED tests and content has been mapped to the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) literacy categories and the Secretary (of Labor's) Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) competencies. The college required students enrolled in Post-Secondary Vocational Certificate Education programs of more than 180 clock hours to take the TABE to demonstrate mastery of basic skills. Students must complete entry level examination within the first six weeks of admission to the program.

Data Analysis .

Factor analysis using a principal components extraction with a varimax rotation was used to determine the factor structure of the responses on the SBI. This factor structure was compared to those regular college students to determine if it resembled one of these structures more than the other. The correlation between the students' TABE test scores and their scores on the SBI and its factors were also be determined. The population demographic are described.

Results

The students in this study were 42 males and 62 females ranging in age from 17 to 65. The mean age was 35. The average number of hours worked per week was 38. Students were seeking entry into a wide variety of occupational

fields. The majority had taken vocational education as their HS track. This sample compares to the campus and college population.

The students in this study are unlike any other students upon which the SBI has been used in the past. Perhaps this is due to the fact that these students had yet to acquire a GPA upon which the SBI is correlated. These students presented only TABE test scores which ranged from 1.1 to 12.9. Mean scores for language arts was 5.72, for math 6.093, for math calculation 6.868, math application 6.455 and reading 6.375. These students are functioning at very low levels as literacy as indicated on the TABE. Table I presents these scores. Quartile scores are presented in Table 2. These student are truly high risk.

Table 1
Occupational Student TABE

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TABE lang. arts	89	1.1	12.9	5.7	3.27
TABE math	87	2.1	12.9	6.1	2.61
TABE MC	31	1.8	12.9	6.7	2.75
TABE MP	87	2.3	12.9	6.5	2.77
TABE reading	87	1.4	12.9	6.4	3.11

Table 2
Percentile scores TABE

	25%	50%	75%
TABE lang. arts	3.35	4.7	8.6
TABE math	3.8	5.6	7.4
TABE MC	5.4	7.4	8.3
TABE MP	4.2	6.2	8.1
TABE reading	4.0	5.6	8.6

Correlation of SBI and TABE

Pearson's correlation of the total SBI score, the Factor 1, Factor 2 and Factor 3 score with the individual TABE scores (language arts, math, math calculation, math application and reading) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Correlations SBI and TABE

	Total	F1	F2	F3
Language arts	.209	.163	.144	.196
Math	.227	.033	.242	.223
Math Calculation	.267	.021	.415	.040
Math Application	.215	.043	.197	.277
Reading	.121	.208	.063	.190

There were no correlations of the TABE test scores and the SBI total or factors 1, 2, or 3.

Factor Analysis

Negatively worded items in the SBI were recoded so that high item scores represented positive study behaviors in the case of all items. A principal components extraction with a varimax rotation converged in 5 iterations. Three componets yielded the factor structure shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Study Behavior Inventory Loading Occupational Students

Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
Item	Loading	Item	Loading	Item	Loading
7	.734	33	.670	14	.574
30	.722	32	.668	18	.560
11	.696	41	.663	15	.516
31	.635	46	.650	2	.464
9	.631	35	.647	42	-.445
10	.625	34	.523	1	.440
26	.616	45	-.481	19	.407
37	.604	28	.461	21	.352
6	.565	22	.435	16	.327
27	.539	25	.429		
29	.531	38	.426		
23	.518	43	-.407		
4	.505	13	.397		
12	.492	44	-.336		
17	.484				
40	.473				
5	.442				
36	.387				

This factor structure for this study group was unlike that found in previous studies. In previous studies, factor 1 is normally composed of items that deal with academic self-efficacy. Factor 2 contains items describing academic behaviors concerning preparation for very specific, long-range academic tasks. Factor 3 contains items describing academic behaviors concerning preparation for routine everyday tasks (Bliss, Vinay, & Koeninger, 1996; Bliss & Mueller, 1986, 1987, 1993). No factor structure emerged strongly for any of the 3 factors. Due to the nature of this study population, one might assume that self-efficacy (Factor 1) would be a factor in the study behaviors of these students. This was not the case. For these students, the predominate factor was one of time and organization i.e. completing assignments on time, getting behind in school work, planning for learning activities, organizing time. In previous studies, Factor 2 dealt with preparation for long-range academic tasks. For these students, Factor 2 clearly had to do with memory and examinations. Examples included difficulty expressing myself in writing, having to re-read material and still not understanding it, unable to recall what just read, test anxiety, doing poorly on tests, changing answers. Perhaps this is due to the focus on test taking for advancement in this setting. Tests are more "high stakes" for this study group as their placement in desired programs means they must achieve certain levels of basic skills. Factor 3 usually focuses on short-term study habits. For these students, Factor 3 again dealt with time, specifically the use of time and organization of time.

Conclusions and Discussion

The factor structure of the SBI responses when used with this sample of high-risk occupational students at a large urban community college does not resemble any responses of students in previous studies and may not be an appropriate instrument for use with those very low skilled students. While the TABE is reported to correlate with the GED there was no correlation with the SBI. Because GPA's were not yet available for students, and many PSAV programs are non-credit and thus do not generate a GPA, it is difficult to determine its predictability value.

The only factor that comes close to any previous studies was Factor 2 for those items dealing with test-taking. This student group seemed to focus on aspects of test-taking, i.e. getting nervous and confused when taking tests, having difficulty planning work, having difficulty picking out important points of reading assignments, changing test answers, poor spelling and mechanics of English composition, making careless mistakes, inability of memorizing facts, studying harder for exams than for other assignments, time limits of tests and worrying about doing well on tests. Perhaps this is due to the nature of the need for achieving satisfactory scores necessary for completion of their certificate

program. According to state standards, students must be at appropriate grade levels by the completion of their program in order to be awarded the certificate for which they are studying. For example, some programs require a 9th grade level in Math, others may require a 10th or 11th. Students are not denied access to programs, but must reach levels by completion thereby putting the student focus on passing basic skills tests.

Data collected in this study did confirm the high risk level of these occupational students. Using the TABE test, these students perform on the average of the 5th or 6th grade level in all of the basic skills, i.e. language arts, math, math calculation, math application and reading. With the range going as low as the 1st level, these students have major barriers to overcome to become educated for the occupation of their choice. Classes that assign readings, require math, or communications are a far reach for these students.

Results of this study should help educators focus on specific skill strategies and behavior plans that can be individualized for each student and thus allow the student to better navigate the educational system that will prepare them for employment. It should also be noted that due to the low academic functioning level, written tests may not be a true indicator of ability of these students. Oral exams may reveal a greater level of knowledge than written ones. In addition, hands on activities rather than reading assignments may give greater success and accomplishment to these students.

Further research needs to be done in order to continue to learn more about this unique population of community college students. In many cases, the community college might be the first and last hope for these individuals to obtain a certificate or skill that would put them into an employment field where they can earn an acceptable wage. Policy makers insist that employment is better than welfare and invest substantial monies into education programs. As educators we need to find better ways of predicting achievement (success) of these students. We need to employ as many strategies as necessary to assist them in the achievement of their goals.

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